

Typed 11 Feb. 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
VIA: Deputy Director for Plans
SUBJECT: Origin and Development of the PRU
and PHOENIX Programs

1. This memorandum is for the information of the Director of Central Intelligence.

2. PRU

A. The program was originally proposed to Headquarters in March 1964. Its objectives were to harass the Viet Cong (VC) in the areas under their control and to collect intelligence on VC intentions and capabilities in the process. Their basic technique was to take all available operational information on a VC-controlled area--hamlet or village--and develop a plan of harassment which could be carried out by a small team--three to ten men--who were knowledgeable of the area. Making maximum use of darkness, the team would penetrate the area and attempt to carry out their plan, usually to eliminate known VC activists. The capture of documents and prisoners was encouraged. More sophisticated techniques such as poison pen letters, forged documents, and VC weapons and uniforms were not included in the original planning.

B. The situation in South Vietnam at this time was at best chaotic. President Diem had been dead five months; Lt. Gen. Khanh had attained power by coup d'etat. The main question was would he be able to get the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) on the offensive. ARVN itself was completely dominated by the military concept of "to clear and hold" territory controlled by the VC. There were no American troops in the country other than the Special Forces. Americans were specifically being targetted for assassination by the VC for the first time. The death of American women and children in the absence of adequate police protection meant that U. S. forces were required to provide police protection for American families.

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C. The VC had nearly closed the noose on Saigon. In 13 of 43 provinces, they were in control of all but the provincial and district capitals. Their control was maintained by terror to which the elimination of thousands of hamlet and village chiefs attested. They had demolished the Strategic Hamlet Program and were challenging the ARVN to battalion-sized engagements. For the first time the enemy showed a willingness to stand and fight. Expertise in guerrilla warfare was winning them a continuing series of victories over the small outposts on the edge of the remaining GVN-controlled territory. Their political-administrative apparatus was hard at work exploiting the territory and people under VC control for the supplies and troops needed to finish off the GVN while their covert associates in GVN territory were undermining the government and the army. Terrorism in Saigon and other large cities had reached a new high.

D. In early 1964 there was a great deal of both official and personal pressure on the American community to stop the VC terrorism. The over-concentration on military operations, and the neglect of activity aimed at the people, were obvious and were pointedly demonstrated by the low ebb (30,000) to which the police had sunk following the death of Diem. Outside the limits of the provincial and district capital towns there were few, if any, elements of the GVN in contact with the people. The police who would ordinarily maintain such contact were in a terrible state of disrepute and disorganization. When the ARVN did venture out of the towns, the devastation and looting wrought on the people in the countryside did anything but bring them closer to the government. One answer appeared to lie in the development of a variety of armed teams of local people who would take on the task of providing the various services the government was supposed to provide. The People's Action Teams (PAT), the Advance Political Action Teams (APA), the Census Grievance Teams (CG), and the Counter Terror Teams (CT), as the forerunner of the PRU, were all part of this effort.

E. The CT (in Vietnamese Biet Kich) Program was started in Kien Hoa province in April 1964 on an experimental basis. Shortly thereafter this program was extended to six other delta provinces and introduced into I Corps at the same time. By January 1965 there were 1,000 people in CT Teams, and the program was considered sufficiently successful to provide a model for a national program. Several hundred VC had been eliminated in the first nine months of operation, and evidence had been collected that the VC had quickly recognized the threat posed by the CTT's. In several areas

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of operation the VC had identified them as their number one enemy. On 31 March 1965, the concept was passed to the White House as Item 10 on a 12 Point Civic Action Program.

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1 April 1965, the President approved the "urgent exploration" of the 12 suggestions for covert and other actions. The recommendation specifically related to the CT Program called for the "Expansion of guerrilla and harassment teams working in Viet Cong-controlled areas. Small, well-trained and armed teams penetrate Viet Cong redoubts, heighten peasant dissatisfaction with Viet Cong controls and harass the Viet Cong through black propaganda, mining of trails, neutralization of unpopular officials, and ambush of Viet Cong patrols."

F. By mid-1966 the program had grown to 2,900 people, including Montagnards, with teams in every province. Its effectiveness was actually best attested to by the freedom with which its members moved around the country, and the large amount of information on VC which was flowing in from the people; but was most easily measured by the several thousand VC it had eliminated. The need for centralized training had emerged and this was being implemented in Vung Tau.

G. A number of abuses of the concept had come to light. These included the use of the CT's by province chiefs as an above average military unit, and for purely personal political purposes such as the harassment of members of rival political factions. The name of the program had begun to attract public attention due largely to pictures in the press of VC heads which had supposedly been cut off by CT teams. Therefore, a decision was taken in August 1966 to rename the program the Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRU) and to adjust its objectives so that they were in line with the traditional mission of the Agency. Thus, the primary objective of the program became the "acquisition of political and tactical intelligence on Viet Cong, its personnel, apparatus, and methods of operation in support of U. S. Government policy in South Vietnam". The primary technique employed by the PRU became the capture of VC. The following statistics show how the PRU efforts to capture VC for purposes of intelligence have developed since 1966:

	CAPTURED	KILLED
April - December 1967	1,894	2,335
1968	7,487	5,854
1969	10,464	4,901

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H. The PRU, which include many ex-VC, have served continually as reconnaissance forces for ARVN and U.S. forces and are in great demand by units such as the Big Red One (U.S. 1st Infantry Division) at Lai Khe in Binh Duong Province. It is also worthy of note that each year since their beginning the PRU have provided thousands of tactical intelligence reports to U.S. and ARVN forces at the district and province level. These are the reports of small guerrilla unit sightings which are the lifeblood of the counter-guerrilla campaign, which pinpoint ambushes, and which keep the guerrillas off balance and unable to hit Allied installations by surprise.

I. Today, as the ARVN and the National Police become more effective, the PRU are being removed from those provinces where they are not needed and are being reduced in others to less than 100 per unit. In order to prevent their misuse by overzealous and political minded officials and to improve their intelligence take, they have been bound since September 1969 by two special rules:

- (1) No operations without a mission order signed by the province or district chief.
- (2) All prisoners are receipted for immediately upon return from the operation.

3. PHOENIX

A. The pattern of the big military actions in Vietnam had been pretty well established by the fall of 1966. War Zone C, the Ia Drang Valley, and An Lao were history. It was now obvious to many more people than in 1964 that military action by itself was never going to do the job. The term "pacification" had received a great deal of currency and the PAT and APA teams, renamed the Revolutionary Development Cadre, had become the primary tool of pacification. As such, they had come to enjoy a fair amount of success but remained relatively helpless at such time as the VC saw fit to attack them in strength. It actually required a major redeployment of ARVN in 1967 to save the pacification program from extinction because the VC had turned on it as a major threat to their existence. The fact that it required a major commitment of troops simply to maintain the program meant that some further ingredient of strategy was required in order to win the war.

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B. The characteristics of the situation were that pacification had grown like topay and there were now more programs than could be counted which were all proceeding independently of each other in every district and province in the country. Furthermore, these programs all came under the responsibility of province and district chiefs who were military men primarily involved in killing VC as opposed to "winning the hearts and minds of the people". The division of districts and provinces into "Tactical Areas of Responsibility" (TAOR's) was a good example of how ARVN and U.S. Military forces had divided up the war and were fighting engagements all over the country largely independent of each other.

C. It had become increasingly obvious that the VC had a massive political organization spread throughout the country, in effect a shadow government which was supporting the VC military forces with many of their indispensable requirements, namely food, intelligence, and recruits. This organization was seen to parallel the GVN from hamlet through village, district, province, and region to Saigon and, equally important, to exist on a completely covert basis in GVN-controlled areas. In other words, there was a VC district chief for every district; and if his district was dominated by the GVN he would probably reside elsewhere, but his basic job was to maintain a VC organization in each hamlet and village in his district which could provide the food, intelligence, and recruits needed by the military forces to keep the war going. If the organization was functioning, then the job was to fulfill the needs of the troops. If the organization was not functioning, the job became one of rebuilding the organization. The critical point became obvious: Without this organization the VC could not maintain the guerrilla war. They would have no food, intelligence, or recruits for the VC troop units, and the burden of the war would fall on the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) whose supply lines were very long and who would not be able to fight as guerrillas because their troops had no local knowledge or support. If they still chose to fight, it would have to be on conventional terms in which case the superior air and fire power of the Free World Forces would quickly dominate. The critical need for a highly concentrated attack on this organization, which came to be known as the Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI), was thus established.

D. These problems had been followed very closely by the White House in the form of Mr. Robert Komer as Special Assistant to the President for Vietnam who seized on several ideas in this area

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almost as soon as they were mentioned by the field. These were the need for unified management of pacification, coordination of intelligence and operations at each level of government, and a coordinated attack on the infrastructure. [REDACTED] C/FE highlighted the first two of these matters for Mr. Komer in a memorandum on 5 September 1966. On 1 December 1966, the Office of Civil Operations (OCO) was established as a solution to the first problem. Before Mr. Komer left Washington in early 1967 to assume the job as chief of pacification in Saigon, he asked CIA for action on the latter two points. The work which had already been done was formalized for him in a package called "Infrastructure Intelligence Collection and Exploitation" (ICEX) which he presented to General Westmoreland as COMUSMACV on 14 June 1967. This package incorporated the District Intelligence and Operations Coordination Center (DIOCC) concept which had begun in January 1967 with the idea of the VC Infrastructure as the primary target.

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E. The "method of operating" described for ICEX in the proposal to COMUSMACV was as follows:

"At each level, these U.S. intelligence and operations coordinating elements will be tasked to coordinate and focus attack on VC Infrastructure, and to stimulate corresponding Vietnamese coordinating committees or centers."

The proposal was adopted by MACV in July 1967 as a joint civilian/military activity. In September 1967, U.S. personnel were assigned as ICEX advisors at corps, province, and district level. These positions were held by CIA personnel at corps and province level and by U.S. Army and Marine personnel at the district level. As efforts proceeded to get the program going in the field the GVN was being pressed to come up with their own framework for the program which they did in December 1967 under the code name of PHUNG HOANG. MACV accordingly changed ICEX as the name of its support activity to that of "PHOENIX" which is a literal translation of the Vietnamese term.

F. The Tet and May 1968 VC offensives, plus the usual coup threat, caused an operational delay in the program's formalization in Saigon until July 1968 when a presidential decree provided the needed impetus. The decree put primary responsibility for the program on the National Police, specifically the Special Police and

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the National Police Field Force. The Special Police, which are advised by CIA, constitute the intelligence collection arm of the National Police with the specific missions of collecting and processing VCI and political intelligence. The Police Field Force, advised by the Public Safety Division of USAID, is a combat, paramilitary organization trained and tasked to react in a timely fashion to the intelligence gathered by the Special Police. All other programs with either an intelligence or a reaction capability in the field are included in the PHUNG HOANG Program. These include the PRU, Regional Forces, Popular Forces, Revolutionary Development Cadre, Military Security Service, Census Grievance, Civilian Irregular Defense Group, and the Chieu Hoi (defector) Program.

C. The basic technique involved in the PHUNG HOANG program is the continued collection of operational information on members of the VCI at each of the PHUNG HOANG centers such as DIOCC's throughout the country and the exploitation of that information by one of the following means:

(1) Recruitment or Defection in Place: This is the ideal method--get someone at ground level who can furnish information on VC/VCI personnel, plans, and operations.

(2) Outright Defection: This method is highly profitable due to the fact that the Hoi Chanh or rallier is ready, willing, and able to provide the program with all the information he possesses and further can be enlisted as a guide for reaction operations.

(3) Capture and Exploitation: When a VCI is captured, he is thoroughly interrogated to obtain all his information. Experience has shown that the hard-core captured VCI will resist interrogation, but usually some worthwhile information is obtained.

(4) Eliminate: This is the least desirable method of exploitation because it precludes interrogation and exploitation. However, his capabilities are denied the VCI.

(5) Compromise or Discreditation: This is accomplished by creating suspicion among the VC that one of their own has betrayed them. Compromise or discreditation is effected by conducting whisper campaigns, planting incriminating evidence to reflect his dishonesty, immorality, or the pursuit for his own personal gain.

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H. Following President Thieu's PHUNG HOANG decree in July 1968, the PHOENIX Program has been subordinate at every level. To all intents and purposes the GVN is conducting the attack on the VCI. During this period until 1 July 1969, CIA provided one-third of the financial support for the advisory effort (MACV provided two-thirds) and a National Director for the program. Since 1 July 1969, MACV has taken over complete financial support of the PHOENIX advisory effort (not PHUNG HOANG). Agency personnel in the regions and provinces are now restricted to the role of deputy coordinators. Both U.S. and ARVN military forces have contributed to the program whenever it has been appropriate such as in cordon and search operations involving whole hamlets, but even in these operations the police have remained responsible for the search aspect.

I. In recent months greater emphasis has been placed on selective targeting of key members of the VCI who have been positively identified rather than the employment of "drag net" methods previously used. There has been noticeable improvement in the professionalism displayed by the Special Police in the metropolitan areas in the field of specific targeting which has resulted in the roll-up of a significant number of high level VCI. The focus will continue to be on the individual and the party apparatus.

J. Actions continue at the national level to insure a uniform and effective system of judicial processing of VCI detainees. The Ministry of Interior on 20 August 1969 issued a directive including several provisions which should show a marked improvement in the effectiveness of the program, e. g., simplifying the paperwork for legal processing, requiring mandatory maximum sentences for Communist Party members and significant cadre, and immediate movement of these categories to Con Son Island or similar national correction centers without having to wait for the Ministry of Interior approval.

K. The 1970 GVN Pacification and Development Plan recognizes the moral and social costs involved by reference to the need for the population and detainees to be treated in a fair, considerate, and just manner. It calls for full notification to village officials of operations in their villages, rapid and equitable screening and release of innocents, better dossiers for more accurate charges, expeditious interrogation and processing of offenders, and notification to all echelons concerned as to the whereabouts and disposition of detainees to provide more effective accountability.

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L. There have been increasing indications from captured documents and prisoner interrogations that the Viet Cong Infrastructure from COSVN level to hamlet is becoming extremely concerned about the effectiveness of PHUNG HOANG/PHOENIX actions directed against them. COSVN Resolution 9 directs increased internal security, expanded security measures to be taken on VC/VCI personnel returning from GVN control, and cautions against PHUNG HOANG/PHOENIX penetrators. Other reports describe VC/VCI targeting of the PHUNG HOANG/PHOENIX organization and key personnel.

M. The PHUNG HOANG goals for 1968 were to establish 44 province and 200 district coordination centers plus the neutralization of 12,000 VCI members out of the estimated total of 85,000 VCI in South Vietnam. As part of an overall accelerated pacification campaign, a special PHUNG HOANG campaign calling for intensified anti-VCI operations was initiated under the sponsorship of the Minister of Interior on 20 October 1968. By the end of the year, all PHUNG HOANG organizational goals were accomplished. Moreover, 15,776 VCI identified by name and position were neutralized. Of these, 11,291 were captured; 2,230 rallied; and 2,255 were killed. Of the total, 13% (2,050) served in positions at district level or higher.

N. The PHUNG HOANG goals for 1969 call for the neutralization of 21,600 VCI or 1,800 per month. These figures were revised downward from the original goal of 33,000 set by the GVN. This was due in part to a more restrictive criteria recommended by PHOENIX and established by the Minister of Interior in December 1968 as a means of getting the field units to concentrate on quality versus quantity in the program. In 1969 through November a total of 7,924 had been captured; 4,457 had defected; and 5,694 had been killed for a total neutralization figure of 18,075. The percentage at district level and above is not yet available.

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